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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000762

SIPDIS

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H PASS TO CODEL MCCAIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/31/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IS](#) [OVIP](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: CORRECTED COPY: PERES MEETS MCCAIN, WARNS OF
GROWING IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN LEVANT, PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RICHARD H. JONES FOR REASONS 1.
4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (U) This cable replaces Tel Aviv 731. Please see
correction in paragraph 6.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary. On 18 March, U.S. Senators John McCain,
Joseph Lieberman, and Lindsey Graham met with Israeli
President Shimon Peres to discuss security concerns in the
region. Their discussion centered on the growing threats of
Iranian nuclear development and expansionism. Peres
highlighted the growing Iranian influence in Syria, Lebanon,
and the Palestinian Territories, and noted that this
influence combined with the lack of strong national
leaderships is already having significant destabilizing
effects in the region. End Summary.

IRAN

[1](#)3. (C) In a meeting on 18 March, U.S. Senators John McCain,
Joseph Lieberman, and Lindsey Graham met with Israeli
President Shimon Peres to discuss security concerns in the
region. Peres raised the issue of Iranian nuclear
development and expansionism as the most significant
challenge, not only to Israeli security, but to that of the
region and the world. He pointed to Iran's development of
expensive long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear
warheads, and questioned the need for these weapons if Iran
does not aspire to nuclear weapons capability, as its
leadership has claimed. Peres highlighted the destabilizing
effects of Iranian expansionism in Syria and Lebanon, and
noted that this is a major impediment to potential
negotiations on the Golan Heights. Peres was emphatic in
stressing that Syria cannot claim the Golan Heights while
still supporting Iranian efforts to turn Lebanon into a
satellite state by way of its patronage of Hizballah. He
suggested that the Arab world needs to look at these issues
and be willing to contribute to a solution.

[1](#)4. (S) Senator McCain echoed Peres's concerns, noting that
his visit to Iraq several days prior had left him with an
even greater sense of the threat posed by Iranian ambitions.
He pointed to intelligence reports that Iran is now sending
dangerous copper explosives into Iraq, and directing funds
through Hizballah to train and send more terrorists into the
country, as well. Senator Lieberman observed that Iran is
likewise gaining a foothold in the Palestinian arena, most
especially through its growing influence in Hamas, and
suggested that this influence could threaten
Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

JORDAN

15. (C) Asked by Senator Lieberman what could be done to reduce Iranian influence in Israel-Palestinian peace negotiations, Peres replied that Jordan would be an especially important country moving forward towards the establishment of a Palestinian state. He suggested that Jordan would be ready and willing to help stabilize a Palestinian government and to help build a secure and "hi-tech" Palestinian economy. This would be essential, Peres argued, in showing Gazans that there is a better alternative.

SYRIA

16. (C) McCain asked Peres to provide his perspective on the Syrian regime and specifically on Bashar al-Asad. Peres replied that Bashar "suffers from the fact of having a wise father," because the same can rarely be said of the son. He noted that the Syrian leader is full of hesitation and indecision, and provided the example of Bashar's contradictory statements about the existence of a Syrian nuclear facility and Israel's alleged bombing of it. Peres suggested that Bashar is a fundamentally flawed leader and will remain unable to make the decisions necessary to advance any potential peace negotiations. He said of the Syrian leader, "what we need to do is replace him, not negotiate with him." (NOTE: REFTEL reported that this remark referenced Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. This is incorrect. Peres was referring to Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. END NOTE.) Asked by McCain whether this meant Israel might intervene, Peres was quick to reply "we must act with great wisdom and carefulness."

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IRAQ

17. (C) McCain briefed Peres on the progress of the Iraq War. He emphasized that while a year ago it wasn't clear whether the U.S. was winning, there is now a lot of evidence that U.S. efforts are succeeding, and that General Petraeus is making significant strides. He noted that one of the new challenges is the growing trend of suicide bombings, which are dangerous, if not for their tactical effects, then for their significant damage to public opinion. Peres reassured the senators that the success of US efforts, if not immediately evident, will be seen in years to come. He provided the analogy of the Vietnam War, which was ostensibly lost by the U.S., but which produced a country that years later is capitalist and democratic.

18. (C) Peres acknowledged that Israel is "not modest," but said his country does have a sense of proportion and is ready to be "a good foot soldier" to make the world a better place. Peres thanked the senators for their support of the Iraq War, and remarked that if the Middle East had been threatened by both Saddam Hussein and Ahmedinejad at the same time, "we would have to go somewhere else."

19. (U) CODEL McCain has not cleared this message.

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JONES